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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000213

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/13/2017

TAGS: ASEC PREL MARR CASC FJ

SUBJECT: FIJI'S INTERIM PM LASHES OUT AT U.S.; SAYS  
SECURITY BARRIERS IN FRONT OF EMBASSY WILL BE REMOVED NEXT  
WEEK; INTERIM AG CHALLENGES AMBASSADOR'S DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY

REF: A. SUVA 212

1B. STATE 48129

1C. SUVA 207

Classified By: DCM Ted Mann, per 1.4 (B) and (D)

Summary

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11. (C) Interim Prime Minister Bainimarama issued an angry press statement April 13 stating that his refusal to meet visiting DAS Davies on April 11 or 12 was meant to "send a clear message" that Fiji will only engage with countries "genuinely committed to assisting us in moving forward." Bainimarama reprised his false claim that the visit of Ambassador Dinger and other chiefs of mission to the military barracks last November was "an attempt to incite mutiny." Late in the day, the interim Attorney General reportedly challenged the Ambassador, along with the British and Australian High Commissioners, to give up diplomatic immunity so the police could thoroughly investigate the "incitement" charges. In his statement, Bainimarama announced that he has directed relevant authorities to remove the street barriers in front of the Embassy by the end of next week. We heard a separate report that officials in the Ministry of Public Works were verbally instructed to remove the barriers by 16:30 today. As of 18:30 local time, we have no indication that any such action will be undertaken today. Embassy EAC decided that Embassy personnel would neither assist nor confront troops or other interim government personnel who may attempt to remove the barriers. Removal of the barriers would leave the Embassy with no/no setback from the street.  
End Summary.

Bainimarama Lashes Out,  
Says US is No Friend of Fiji

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12. (U) In a press statement April 13, Interim PM Bainimarama issued an angry response to visiting DAS Davies' April 12 statement that he had come to Fiji as a friend and that Bainimarama's failure to agree to a meeting was "a missed opportunity." "What kind of friend is he," said Bainimarama, "when only a month ago he spoke from thousands of miles away through video conferencing....demanding for the immediate return of Fiji to democracy?" "What does he know about Fiji and its people to be able to make a statement like that?" Bainimarama said U.S. assistance to Fiji was very small and that Fiji has little to lose if the U.S. continues to isolate Fiji. Echoing statements he previously made about Australia and New Zealand, Bainimarama concluded that "It would be best if they left us alone."

**¶3. (U)** In contrast to the U.S. attitude toward Fiji, Bainimarama stated that "we are ever grateful to the friendly nations in Southeast Asia as well as China and India for recognizing our problems as being internal and that the issues be best left to the people of Fiji to solve for themselves." He also said that Fiji was prepared to engage with the Pacific Island countries, Australia and New Zealand through the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and the PIF Eminent Persons Group, and with the European Union, noting a high-level delegation is traveling to Brussels this weekend for Cotonou consultations next week.

False Claim that Ambassador Attempted to Incite Mutiny

**¶4. (SBU)** Bainimarama repeated the false claim that the Ambassador, along with the UK and Australian High Commissioners, had attempted to incite rebellion among RFMF officers when they visited the RFMF barracks in late November 2006. "This (visit to the barracks) clearly was an act of interference and an attempt to incite mutiny. So I ask how Mr. Davies would have accompanied the same Ambassador to call upon me under the pretext of a courtesy visit and wanting to be a "friend of Fiji." Colonel Pita Driti made the same "incitement to mutiny" claim in a speech to troops April 12. Ref A reviews Driti's statements and reports the text of a joint U.S. Embassy, UK High Commission, Australian High Commission response.

AG Suggests Diplomats Should Waive Diplomatic Immunity

**¶5. (SBU)** According to Fiji One television news, in the early evening of April 13, Interim Attorney General Aiyez-Khaiyum issued a statement urging the U.S. Ambassador,

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and the high commissioners of the UK and Australia, to waive their diplomatic immunity and allow the police to fully investigate the charge they "incited mutiny." This approach, said the interim AG, would demonstrate the diplomats' commitment to the "rule of law."

Attack on the Human Rights Report

**¶6. (U)** Bainimarama, who earlier appeared to have taken our Human Rights Report in stride, strongly criticized the report, stating that "The United States should look at its own human rights violations first before pointing fingers at relatively minor cases of such violations in Fiji." (Comment: The human rights violations in Fiji since the coup have been anything but "minor." The military and interim government have waged a systematic campaign of intimidation and physical violence against those opposed to the coup, suppressed free speech and the right to assembly, and tampered with the formerly independent legal and court systems. End comment.)

Bainimarama Orders Removal of Security Barriers  
In Front of Embassy

**¶7. (U)** In his statement, Bainimarama said he has directed the relevant authorities to remove the barriers that currently block the street in front of the Embassy by the end of next week. These barriers have been in place, with the permission of successive Fiji governments, since the East Africa bombings in 1998. Bainimarama said the barriers "denied the taxpayers who have funded construction of this road a fair right of free and unrestricted access." Removal of the barriers, he said, "is in line with the withdrawal of military personnel from the various checkpoints as well as relaxation of restrictions at those installations."

Source Tells Us Removal Could Take Place April 13

**¶8. (C)** SDL party National Director Peceli Kinivuwai told us April 13 that the Minister of Urban Development and Public

Utilities, Jone Navakomocea (a former SDL party member), had told him Bainimarama wanted to remove the barriers by 16:30 April 13. Bainimarama reportedly told Navakomocea to coordinate the action with the Suva City Council. When we told Kinivuwai about the Commodore's press release, Kinivuwai guessed that coordination with the city of Suva was too difficult to accomplish in one day. As of 19:00 April 13 local time there is no sign any action to remove the barriers will be taken today. (Note: As reported reftels B and C, we received a diplomatic note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requesting that the Embassy remove the barriers by April 13. Per ref B instructions, we declined to do so.)

EAC Decides on "Don't Assist, Don't Confront" Stance

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¶9. (C) Embassy EAC met late afternoon April 13. The EAC decided that Embassy personnel should not assist troops or interim government personnel to remove the barriers, nor should they confront them. RSO has conveyed this approach to all guard personnel. If troops arrive, Embassy guards (all of whom are unarmed) will move from the barriers to a position directly in front of the main entrance to the Embassy.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Statements by DAS Davies and other US officials condemning the coup and favoring a quick return to democracy, and the generally positive media play those statements receive in Fiji, have clearly rattled the Commodore, the interim AG and other interim officials. Their statements today were poorly reasoned and very bitter. We have every reason to believe that Bainimarama will follow through on his threat to remove the street barriers in front of the Embassy. If that takes place, the Embassy will be left with no/no setback from the street and the Embassy's physical security will be greatly reduced.

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